

**Statement of  
Dwight David Brashear, Chief Executive Officer  
Capital Area Transit System, Baton Rouge, LA**

**Before the  
United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Highways, Transit, and Pipelines**

**Hearing on  
“Rebuilding Highway and Transit Infrastructure on the Gulf Coast  
Following Hurricane Katrina”  
October 27, 2005**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee and guest, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Capital Area Transit System (CATS) from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I am honored that you have requested me here today to discuss what a valuable part mass transit has performed during hurricane Katrina, and as it continues to aid in the devastation and aftermath of this cataclysm.

First, let me say I bring greetings from Baton Rouge Mayor-President Kip Holden and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. They were pivotal in my and CATS ability to maximize efforts in providing essential emergency services. I must recognize the contributions of FEMA and FTA in providing policy direction and technical assistance. I would also like to recognize all the agencies that worked so tirelessly for many weeks to assist in the needs

of displaced citizens and the delivery of goods and services, and they include the Mayor-Presidents Office, the City-Parish employees, the Governors staff, the metropolitan planning organization, state police, local fire and police, and the many public and private agencies and organizations. Lastly, I would like to express the gratitude of all the people along the Gulf Coast for the help that this great nation has given, from you the elected officials to the many people and organizations from every state in the nation. I am a witness to the resolve, resourcefulness, and the commitment of people extending a hand and opening their hearts to the millions of hurting displaced families, a lot that have lost everything, everything. I say to you today, we must continue to meet the short term emergency needs and we must commit ourselves to the long term rebuilding and resettlement needs of our fellow sisters and brothers.

Transit in Baton Rouge Pre-Katrina had CATS eyes on a major public involvement process to put a referendum to the voters of East Baton Rouge Parish to expand service and to develop a transit infrastructure for Bus Rapid Transit and light rail. We had a fair amount of traffic congestion and associated infrastructure issues. Baton Rouge was a capital city of

approximately 400,000 population with an estimated urbanized area of 600,000. It was a city excited about transit innovation and growth potential.

Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. I describe it as shock and awe of biblical proportion. A critical crisis situation happened overnight. Within 24 hours approximately 400,000 of the New Orleans 1.3 population were moved to the Baton Rouge area. The road infrastructure was over capacitated. A 20 minute peak period commute went to almost 2 hours. The transit system was overwhelmed. Buses simply had to pass people up along transit routes due to passenger loads. Food, water, gas, utilities and medical became critical supplies. A logistics nightmare ensued for moving anything. Support and coordination efforts of federal, state, and local entities were pushed and stressed beyond endurance limits. The physical destruction of property was beyond comprehension. Well over 80% of New Orleans was under water. We persevered and moved to the hurricane triage stage.

FEMA, FTA, the military, state and local agencies such as CATS and the New Orleans Regional Transit System (NORTA) began to provide emergency services. At one point I was tapped by the governor to assist

with the coordination of evacuation transportation. School buses, transit buses and inter-city coaches from around the country came to assist in our needs. FEMA, state and local emergency plans were implemented. Some may say it could and should have been done better. I simply say, my shoulders are broad. As we have more time to reflect and assess how the emergency operation was implemented, these discussions will result in new protocols, new processes and programs; and this is good. Real change requires real change and that is exactly what we are doing in Baton Rouge.

CATS, NORTA, FEMA, FTA, the MPO, state and local governments worked 14 hour days from September 8-19 to develop an emergency Baton Rouge-New Orleans project proposal. FEMA and FTA responded with a 47 million dollar contract on October 1, 2005. This is probably the largest FEMA award to a mass transit property in history.

Today CATS and NORTA work side by side in our city providing emergency mass transit services to displaced hurricane victims and also providing a transportation option to gridlock and traffic congestion.

NORTA is operating emergency fixed route local and ADA paratransit service in Baton Rouge. We will shortly begin operation of Park-N-Ride

express service with an innovative “buses only on shoulder” program. The FEMA/FTA project has also allowed NORTA to begin calling back to work their 1,350 displaced employees. NORTA has also begun start up service in New Orleans. This is a transit success story because the partners persevered and championed the mission. It required real change in state and local policies and procedures, real change in coordination and internal operations of CATS and NORTA. It has required help from sister transit agencies for equipment. It has required the replacement of fear with endless possibility and boundless opportunity. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for allowing me to tell you that mass transit is working and working well and I pray that God will continue to bless this nation and to bless this government. Thank you